UP TO MIDNIGHT

George Meredith

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UP TO MIDNIGHT

BY GEORGE MEREDITH

A SERIES OF DIALOGUES CONTRIBUTED
TO *THE GRAPHIC*

NOW REPRINTED FOR THE FIRST TIME

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

OF the many weaknesses of authors not one seems more general than the predilection for pedagogic dialogue. From Plato to the present day contributor no fair opportunity to create an imaginary group of super-keen conversationalists, who, from supposedly different angles of personality, battledore and shuttle-cock current opinion between them, is allowed to escape. With high hopes he sets his stage and with a growing conviction of the importance and diversity of his characters he leads on one marionette after another until the group is complete, and then proceeds to pull the strings. It is great fun, to be sure. Meredith said so when he began with "Up to Midnight." They all say so and mean it. But somehow the audience quickly finds itself yawning, and the author in time, though to be sure the last of all, finds that it takes but a very short time for his play-people to in-breed, or in-write, to a single type, that he is ex-

pressing himself in the same key through half a dozen mouths and that the fun of pulling the strings is hardly compensating. Then, too, the long-suffering editor and publisher, the first to notice the empty benches, has a limit of patience and calls a halt. The obsequies are usually brief, though thorough. In the case of "Up to Midnight" this was particularly so. So thorough, indeed, that the editor of Meredith's complete works omits it entirely, and his bibliographer with far less excuse does likewise.

THE following paragraph, which appeared in *The Graphic*, London, on February 1, 1913, reveals Mr. Meredith's own view of this work as expressed in a letter which he wrote to Frederick Greenwood:

GEORGE MEREDITH AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE GRAPHIC

The first of his series of causeries "Up to Midnight"

A correspondent has been pointing out that Mr. Meredith once contributed a series of articles to these columns forty years ago, although they are not included in the bibliography of the Memorial Edition of his works. He refers to these in a letter to Frederick Greenwood, "I am having some fun in *The Graphic*, and might by and by turn the Dialogues to good purpose."

In response to various requests we have decided to reprint the series.

UP TO MIDNIGHT

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I.

THE ARGUMENT. — *Power of Speech of British Islanders Vindicated. The Lesser Parliamentarians and Scandal of them. Sir John Saxon and Mr. Helion. An Impudent Verse. Reunion of Friends, and a Short Conversation up to Midnight.*

SHALL it be said of us that conversation has expired in our island, that we do our talking, as the Chinese do their dancing, by nods and blinks at a mazy proxy Press? There is as good speech in the mouth as ever came out of it. How this world of Britain is misunderstood! Why, we are of the born race of dialoguers; we can give, and we can take too; our ear is our neighbor's if he wants it; we have, being fitted, capacity for deep digestive pauses; let our neighbor but show that the passion of the vocabulary is on him, and we are silent, even as

one wave of ocean sinks to swell another. And concerning our power of giving: are we not England, Scotland, Ireland, with the Principality of Wales, and a seasoning from America like a whiff of Atlantic brine? English is solid, Scottish is shrewd, Irish a jet; and there you have earth, well, and water; a sober source, a receptacle for infiltration, and a lively abundance. Cambrian seized by his *awen* is a boiling geyser. All of them combined, with their interfusions and their varieties, not forgetting the pungent flavor of *Das Americanismus* coming over them occasionally (a flavour of which no man shall declare, whether it be that of age that hath been long since pickled, or of youth that marvellously overskippeth itself into lantern-jawed maturity); all these, I repeat, so hearty and downright, so sly, so voluble, so fiery, are a guarantee for speech. Moreover, we are great travellers; we see and hear many curious things. We have Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas pouring in a constant supply of strange facts and anecdotes. We breed

eccentrics: we have humourists in every walk, and of all kinds, simple and complex.

Our Joe Miller (and pray do not despise him, for Joe salteth and peppereth conversation, though he must not be used with less discretion than salt and pepper) is the richest and biggest fellow of all his brethren. The Joes of the Continent are pigmies to him, beggars. They have besides a trick of showing our poor human nature at its frailest and worst, like an Italian mendicant confraternity, and make a joke of *that* to catch a halfpenny laugh, which mannered persons cry avaunt at. We will speak no more of them. Very well, then; I maintain that we have the two treasure-stores for conversation, the full one and the empty one. Nature has started us with a Treaty of Reciprocity. Imagine the gift of language in the form of a piano. I protest it is not to be superior to be pressing the pedal and insisting on sound, like your Germans, or to be running up the gamut-octaves incessantly and down again, and then bumping the notes and

splashing out a tune all to oneself, in the fashion of the French. This it is to be transcendent monologuers, copious, overflowing, possibly brilliant, but it is not to be conversational. A Frenchman sees a dozen things to reply to before you have well begun: a *oui* or a *non* is quite enough to strike a new keynote for another of his symphonies, and he is not to be restrained. Those good Germans perturb the ear's tight drum with thunderous emphasis, as if nothing but a drumstick should rightfully play on it. We seem to be in a far earlier state of evolution from our early progenitors than the one which Mr. Darwin has examined for us of late, while they are what they call conversing. In fine, there is that in English sobriety, Scotch system, Irish fluency, and Welsh ardour, which sanctions and animates the conversation, such as you will not get elsewhere. And it is still to be had, though the present is not an Augustan epoch for it. The Parliament of the Lesser House, as they termed a certain private gathering of gentlemen hav-

ing for their object to converse, is said to have been the scene of admirably sprightly evenings. By some mischance, inexplicable to a greater number of the members, it came to an end. It was too ambitious, or it had lost its original *ictus*, or it fell to dealing in scandal; or worse, its doors had opened to a bore. None can tell the exact reason for its abrupt disruption. Had the members been persecuted they would doubtless have held together valiantly, as in the days of iron when the affiliator of any violently dispersed society took refuge in woods and caves, and communicated by signs and countersigns, and a variety of subterfuges; all which things disposed the minds of men to an enduring toughness, so that they became solidly welded. But now that systematic persecution has been withdrawn, the ironical gift of freedom we enjoy lets associations live that they may perish of their own combustibility; and this they arrive at with astonishing precocity. It has been asserted that the Parliament of the Lesser House lasted for a space barely

beyond a couple of years; a short period indeed if we consider the nature of its aims, though when the plan it was founded on is contemplated, the number of members embraced by it will appear prodigious. A combination or club of gentlemen meeting simply to converse, and agreeing to tolerate in one another plain speech upon every topic discussed, could hardly expect to count themselves twenty; yet they passed that limit. It is true that they exploded as soon as they had done so. The famous figure of English rhetoric which speaks of the cup being full, and the single drop in excess making the waters of bitterness overflow, may be applied to them, as to the nature of the result. They were scattered in a manner unintelligible to pure reason. The report of the wicked was that it arose from one of the waiters finding his shoe-latchet undone, and applying to one of the young women of the establishment to fasten it for him; she was seen kneeling at the man's feet in the hall by a venerable member, who condemned the pair in our

emphatic vernacular, especially objurgating against the eternal intrusions of the sex. It happened that a certain member, a Mr. Brighton, had given notice of a motion to admit ladies to a share of their privileges, a detestable project in the eyes of old Sir John Saxon, the Warwickshire squire; and no sooner had Mr. Brighton undertaken the defence of the above-mentioned girl, than Sir John took up the whole question, to the tune of "Women in their proper places." The raging of this conflict overhead caused a revolution below, where it was justly argued, primarily, that the act was in itself innocent; secondly, that in any case it might easily have been overlooked; and lastly, that gentlemen who made so much of trivial circumstances were not worth serving. The gentlemen were in consequence very badly served, and from perpetually complaining to the steward, they afflicted him with the servants' epidemic, and he departed, leaving an obscurity in the record of his transactions which caused an investigation — a proceeding

hateful to the world underneath at all times, intolerable in a season of smothered anger. The servants followed the steward in single file, and it is said that this was sufficient to break up the famous Parliament of the Lower House, which had been for a moment actually dreaded by society, and which it was once considered so much a distinction to belong to.

Hence at least the saying that they were lifted off a footman's shoe. The amount of truth in it is perhaps not measurable, from its diminutiveness, but clubs that have dealt their blows about must expect a hearty kick whenever they have consented to collapse; particularly a club whose members assumed the right to speak plainly on every topic. It is clear that they can but exist at the mercy of the topic destined to make their outspeaking too much for their cohesion.

Down at the meet the other day at Alley-in-Arden, when the hounds were at fault for some few minutes, Sir John Saxon came across Mr. Helion, and hailed him, to

the effect that he was always glad to see one of the Lesser Parliamentarians anywhere. Mr. Helion remembered pensively the strong support he had given, without much interrogation of his conscience, to Brighton's motion for flooding the club with the disintegrating element, *i.e.*, with ladies. He hastened to repeat a good story. Sir John warmed to him after laughing, and asked for news of other old members, to wit, Sir Patrick, and Mr. M'Nimbus, Dr. Anthony, and those two ends of the scale in every mortal conversation, Mr. Brighton and Mr. Finistare, named familiarly Optimy and Pessimy, who used to be such fun when discussions had been stripped to the bone, and those two fought over it. Mr. Helion invited Sir John to meet them at table. "With great pleasure," the old gentleman said, "if you'll let the table be mine. Bring them down to me. I am too old to dine out."

Mr. Helion complimented him on his firm seat in the saddle.

Sir John thanked heaven that he was still at home there, but affirmed that he imagined all writers had set their faces against hunting. "And what on earth have they got to give us in the place of it? A Turkish bath! It's the nearest approach to making mechanical men I've heard of yet. I would say 'Pardon me' to any one but an old L. P. man. But here's the truth: you writers sit in a chair half your days, and you get to thinking too thin and too fine. If my blood, at my age, goes as swift as hounds in full cry, I say I'm a better judge of what's good for a man than you; and I'm very much obliged to my stag or my fox: and I don't believe I'm more of a brute than the fox's advocate, though he calls me one. That was one of our old arguments, Helion, and I held my ground. Depend upon it, when you writers get below the temperature of healthy blood — and you all do; you *must*, with that everlasting scrawling of yours — you may be good at logic, but you don't belong to your generation. You're behind or ahead

somewhere: you're not in the race. Let men run as long as they can. My experience is that warm blood is kinder than cold, though an old dog-fox does lose his brush for it. There! there's stuff for a song for you."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Helion, bowing.

Let idiots addle
  Their pates with the pen.
I straddle my saddle,
  And ride among men.
The Turkish bath box is,
  For muscle, a sham;
I owe it to foxes,
  I'm strong as I am!

"Straddle my saddle's a notion comes out of a desk," cried Sir John. "By the way, I don't mind owing it to foxes. You can't beat me with a sneer. That's for fellows who sit all day hatching them."

Sir John presently confessed that "Straddle my saddle" was one of those

melancholy rhymes which threaten to haunt a man for the remainder of his life, and he rather earnestly entreated Mr. Helion to be of his party, and join the good old English side. At that moment the pretty note of the hounds — what more musical on a soft breezy winter's day? something between a sob and a chuckle — called him off. He shouted over his coat-tail: "Make sure of Sir Patrick — eight beds — a fortnight — Christmas!" —

It was in this manner, the latest chronicle assures us, that some of the scattered members of the club reassembled, and again the question was started, "By what means had they been broken up?" Their president, a man of head and weight, had been summoned to office in India, the Doctor observed, forgetting himself. As if an ostensible reason were wanted! The habit of the Lesser Parliamentarians was to play their themes until there sprang a good one for the chase.

"What a price we pay for India!" said Mr. Finistare. The Doctor perceived

his error immediately; for a serious word had to be guarded with all the might of the members to keep it out of the clutches of Optimy and Pessimy. He tried to retract. Unfortunately, Mr. Brighton was too quick for him.

"We pay a price for India, you say? The nation wears the splendidest jewel in the world — the most magnificent that ever stood on the brow of any kingdom! And you make a subject of universal envy a matter of lamentation."

MR. FINISTARE. "I can prove that it is matter of anxiety to those who use foresight."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Why do your weeping before a tear is due?"

MR. FINISTARE. "I warn you that we are staking our very existence on the retention of India. Already, in almost every home in the kingdom we feel the strain."

MR. BRIGHTON. "We may; and it is just as certain that it is elevating and bracing

us to perform the task — the noblest ever offered to a body of men. India" —

"Please," Sir Patrick interposed, "confine yourself to one Presidency, in charity to the shortness of mortal life. We have had some winds recently, Mr. Brighton."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Ay, Sir Patrick, our seamanship has been worthy of its reputation. It is hourly on trial, and as I was about to say of India, the magnitude of our difficulty and the incessant strain conjures up resources such as our sailors show."

SIR JOHN. "I agree with you. We learn from misfortune. I saw published the other day the letter of a doctor, who was called out at night in the great gale, and he observed that all the roofs in exposed situations were blown off, except the thatched ones."

MR. HELION. "The counsel to roof with thatch will be found in Landor's 'Imaginary Conversation between Cæsar

and Lucullus,' published 1829, and not heeded to this day."

MR. FINISTARE. "We are roofed with thatch in India. Let but one spark fall on it! one will be quite enough, if there should happen to be a European complication at the same time."

MR. BRIGHTON. "If I am walking on the high road at night, with a thousand pounds jingling in my pocket, and four-and-twenty burglars lining the way in the darkest part of the hedge, let but one shot be fired, it will be enough for me — out goes my money."

THE DOCTOR. "India was not mentioned that time. Quick! Sir John."

SIR JOHN. "Well, I can tell you how it was our prosperity came to a stop."

SIR PATRICK. "It's the identical reason you have, I don't doubt, and if I venture to differ it's only because I'm plagued eternally with a private opinion; but, upon my conscience, my dear Sir John, since it's undeniable we became acquainted in that famous short-lived

institution, I can say, like the man that was blown up, and rejoiced he was able to see such a fine lot of country, the catastrophe is exceedingly much to my profit."

SIR JOHN. "As long as you think that, Sir Patrick, you honour and make me happy."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Put the cause of that catastrophe somewhere betwixt the root of the tongue and the tip. There's nothing creates and compresses steam like the tongue, and we let it wag till it fairly cracked us."

SIR JOHN. "I say we came to grief because we did not dine together, and we sat beyond midnight. My experience is that all foolish and dangerous stuff is talked after twelve at night. And I am convinced that to talk comfortably men must first have sat at table. So, my dear good friends, I offer you my table in town and country, and I merely stipulate that, as it appears to me improper and unwise to go on talking into the next day — you know

what comes of it in the members of the Greater House — we sit up to midnight and no longer."

Who could object? None did. Sir John Saxon possessed a cook — never mind of what country — a cook of genius, as you will know when you have partaken of one of his dinners: and it is notable that men after leaning to or passing forty, never complain of having to go to bed upon the stroke of midnight. No one had anything to say with the exception of Mr. Brighton, who proposed, in consideration of their resolve to keep civilised hours, that they might now take advantage of their opportunity to show a bright example and win a great benefit.

But here Mr. Helion exclaimed that he heard the clock strike.

"We have sat up to midnight," said Sir John, "and anything now proposed or discussed I shall hold to be nonsense, or worse. Another glass of claret, Sir Patrick."

"The pact of Bordeaux with you, Sir John," replied his friend.

II.

THE ARGUMENT. — *The Proposed Polar Expedition. Polar Madness. Labourer, Tenant, and Landlord. Optimy's Conspiracy. The Hypocrisy of Men, and Failure of a First Experiment.*

DR. ANTHONY, with his host, Sir John Saxon, and Mr. Helion, took a walk after breakfast, leaving Mr. M'Nimbus in the library, Mr. Brighton and Mr. Finistare to court the children in the nursery, and Sir Patrick the elderly ladies in the drawing room.

"I would get up at any hour this year to find a frost," said Sir John.

"The North Pole decidedly wants doctoring," Mr. Helion observed.

"Yes, if you like," said Dr. Anthony, "but whether a couple of whalers of Dundee can do it is another question."

MR. HELION. "Homœopathic doses are popular."

THE DOCTOR. "Nothing is more popular than humbug."

MR. HELION. "Luckily Brighton is not here to hear you."

SIR JOHN. "Nor my daughters. They dose their little ones every other night with globules and tinctures, after a mighty deal of consultation. The homœopathic books are big, whatever the dose may be."

THE DOCTOR. "Treatises on the art of hoodwinking the human race cannot be confined in a narrow compass."

SIR JOHN. "Are you against the project of a fresh polar expedition?"

THE DOCTOR. "I don't say that. I would rather not have a relative on board, and I prefer not to risk a single man of the British navy. But, you see, there are several learned societies that have an instinct of its being to the advantage of mankind, and as we have

the money, I think we are bound to pay for experiments."

MR. HELION. "To satisfy the instincts of learned bodies?"

THE DOCTOR. "Where everything's in the dark, we have nothing else than instincts to trust to."

SIR JOHN. "I object to my poor Hodge and his drudge having to pay one penny towards satisfying the instincts of learned bodies."

MR. HELION. "That is part of the prospect undoubtedly. Say that the bonnie Dundee boats are stocked, and sail, and that they discover the anthropological people's anthropeidesical people, which are a probably anthropophagical people, and either proceed to consume them by the joint, or heighten their gusto by boiling them down for oil. Our instincts become excited by not hearing of them. The City of Marmalade is in a fever. We are reproached; and we instinctively turn and reproach the Government, and the Government

stands at bay until the voice of the learned bodies blows through the popular trumpets deafeningly; whereupon the Chancellor of the Exchequer washes his conscience and finds a hole in his pocket, and away goes the vanguard of the British navy to be among ice-hummocks on active service, happy if it should come across a bone, or a bit of a hat, or the remnant of a frozen expletive pent in the melancholy Polar air, like an exiled anatomy of a most appealing kind — just to remind the honest tars that their brothers did go that way cursing their lot. And for that expedition, possibly for another to follow, poor old Hodge certainly has to help to pay."

THE DOCTOR. "Hard on him! Still I think we ought to fight the Pole, if only because it keeps us in training."

SIR JOHN. "Ah! Let's keep in training by all means. I suppose a pugilist's method is the best for an example; he

hits at a bag that won't crack the knuckles."

THE DOCTOR. "Hunting the Pole is a kind of transmitted Quixotry among sailors. It's their mystery — their nut. All who have been to the Arctic regions are ready to go again."

MR. HELION. "I heard of a case . . ."

THE DOCTOR. "Don't allude to it. Liebig, pemmican, have put that out of the list of probabilities. And a horror like that may happen in a wreck on the South Pacific as well as in Greenland. I have a friend who is a genius or a fool in his speculations — always dancing on the tight rope between the two; I assure you, he has a firm belief that we shall one day master the Pole and command the elements."

MR HELION. "With a modest hope that it may all come to pass in his day, I presume? Men of that sort are costly citizens. Pursue him with a doctor's certificate of madness."

THE DOCTOR. "He would take refuge in one

of the learned societies, and claim rights of asylum — the philosopher's benefit of clergy."

SIR JOHN. "Upon my soul, the madmen appear to have got half the business of the world into their hands. The knaves manœuvre them, and the donkeys and the cowards are their tools and their prey. Look at those cottages. Aren't they comfortable? I could live in one of them myself with pleasure — glad to get away from my servants. Considering the price of provisions, I raised my labourers' wages. Well, up starts an agitator. They had nothing to complain of, but out they went to him. They wanted to have a general rise!"

MR. HELION. "Aha! That's a new feature in Hodge's character — there's an idea in that."

SIR JOHN. "What?"

MR. HELION. "His malady has been the total absence of agitation in his system for I don't know how long. It

seems that he can think of others beside himself, then. He's beginning to use his wits; the old fellow is absolutely a little fore-thoughtful."

SIR JOHN. "You writers treat every difficulty we have to contend with as a pot to light a fire under. I call my property my own. The tenants on my estates — I do things now I never thought of doing when I was a young man — they come to terms with me; I don't force them to farm my ground; I indemnify them liberally for my preserves; and they have fair leases. If they don't pay their men well, is it my fault? But if they don't, and they're left in the lurch by a strike, and are beaten, by-and-by it falls upon me."

MR. HELION. "The subject is not one of mine specially. But conceive that the labourer should become a better article; fancy his putting spirit — *agitation* into his work, getting tolerably independent, holding his head up, taking a pride in

himself; wouldn't his work be about twice its present value? The price of land has doubled, and it seems to me that the price of labour insists upon rising as a matter of course. I want to see a strong, provident, self-respecting fellow, instead of a bowed, rheumatic, reckless propagator, whose bright ideal is beer; and I think it unfair that, such as he is, his strength — which is about one-fourth of what it might be — should be sucked out of him, and the poor creature then tossed to the country for subsistence and burial."

SIR JOHN. "By George!"

THE DOCTOR. "You were speaking of the weather, Sir John."

SIR JOHN. "Was I? When was I? I tell you those cottages are a sight to see in summer. My daughter Mary went down to one of them last year for a slip of a creeping rose. The fronts are covered with honeysuckle and jessamine, clematis over the porches, and a half-dozen standard

roses in the gardens. You'd strip the landlords till you had 'em bare! Weather? the whole country's rolled in a wet blanket. The only pity is that some fellow didn't prophecy it."

THE DOCTOR. "True, Sir John, capital! We should have had the consolation of boasting of something, in that case. Here comes Sir Patrick."

SIR JOHN. "The fact is, Helion is one of those dreamers who ought to have it proved on 'em they're gabbling incendiaries."

THE DOCTOR. "By our rules we speak out, though the hearer suffer fiendish torture."

SIR JOHN. "I suffer?"

THE DOCTOR. "I'll trouble you for a composing draught, Sir Patrick."

SIR PATRICK. "I bring whisper of a conspiracy. Brighton has emboldened the ladies, and the ladies have captured Finistare, and deuce a bit of sitting do we get tonight. I lament the loss

to you of your after-dinner cigar, Mr. Helion."

MR. HELION. "I had a particularly fine one to offer you."

SIR PATRICK. "It might be managed."

THE DOCTOR. "Ay, but I charge you with being a member of the conspiracy."

SIR PATRICK. "Pooh, Diplomacy. We're to be dragged away from the claret to the drawing room and music, and sit at that up to midnight. My counsel is, if we can't circumvent, not to resist, and they'll never repeat the spectacle twice."

SIR JOHN. "We've entered the Christmas week, and Christmas Eve and Christmas Day don't belong to us. And I don't have my girls about me every day. The worst is, they will bring their husbands with them — I mean, for any chance of our sitting in private. Lord help us! The fun of the young is purgatory to their elders."

SIR PATRICK. "Helion, my dear boy, smoking's a barbarous habit."

MR. HELION. "It's distinctly counselled by wise men that with the advance of civilisation we be on our guard not to relinquish the virtues of the barbarians."

SIR PATRICK. "That's admirable as it is sententious — to speak in the compact style, like your critics. But the cigar?"

MR. HELION. "We must postpone it till we're released'

SIR PATRICK. "The claret's a clear sacrifice! It's gone, and we can't recall it. It's what they call an oblation to the ladies — with just the comfort of knowing it remains in bottle!"

No indication of Mr. Brighton's plot was seen before the claret had performed its round. Sir John's youngest daughter then said to him, "Papa, we're going to begin tonight to take you with us, for if we don't we shall never see anything of you after dinner this week, and it is a very bad example to young men, and this week is ours."

"All the weeks are yours if you will only condescend to claim them," said Mr. Brighton, rising.

There was some stumbling before the commencement of the triumphant march upstairs, in consequence of the hospitable old baronet's anxiety lest his guests should not have had wine enough. Wine, however, was totally declined; by none more loudly than by Sir Patrick.

"I don't know *why* we've come up," Sir John observed, after staring about the room and resigning himself to a drowsy chair.

"If it's to share the dulness of the ladies it's a very sure object," murmured Mr. M'Nimbus, whose claret had really been recommended to him by a physician, and was, therefore, due to his bodily state.

"Brighton's trick, it seems," Sir John tried to explain their common mishap to him.

"Brighton," said Mr. M'Nimbus, "is a genius to plant us in such a perfect picture

of the revolutionary condition of the age and all at one stroke."

No conversation was to be obtained from Mr. M'Nimbus. Sir John called for music, in the tone of a footman announcing a guest. Only four ladies were present. Two went to the piano. After their performance Mr. Brighton and Mr. Finistare, Sir Patrick and Mr. Helion, were invited to sing. Of these, Mr. Finistare was persuaded to the attempt, and in a deep and hollow voice, as if it were a report of strange doings in a tunnel, he committed his offence. The ladies thanked him. Again they played. Sir John was asleep. Mr. M'Nimbus had fastened himself to an illustrated book. Sir Patrick was entangled in the game of chess with a serious antagonist in a cap.

"Ah! you have begun badly," Mr. Helion said to Miss Annie Saxon, "you should have tried us at our amusement, and begun by *talking*, which you do quite as well as we, to say the least; and we should have acknowledged it. You would

have engaged us all, instead of leaving it to our opinion to go to sleep or play chess in a corner. This comes of following an enthusiast."

"Would there ever be an impulse to anything without the enthusiast?" said Miss Annie. "Mr. Brighton is faithful to us. I wish I could say it of you and Sir Patrick."

"I? my dear lady!" cried Sir Patrick, starting up as high as deference to his severe adversary would permit. "Is there a duty more urgent than the one I'm doing?"

The lady laughed and said to Mr. Helion, "Would he ever have made that blunder if he had not been suffering dreadfully?"

Mr. Helion threw over Sir Patrick with a treacherous shrug.

Music abandoned, coffee and tea having served their turn, conversation was tried, but as there was no guard (the Doctor was listening to the "symptoms" of the spinster sister of Sir John in a corner

at an angle with Sir Patrick), it became without an instant's deviation the prey of Optimy and Pessimy.

Miss Saxon looked up at the clock. "Do you ever yawn in your conferences and wonder when it is going to be twelve o'clock?" she asked.

"We always find it comes too soon," replied the simple Helion, unmasking the hypocrite as blandly as Sir Patrick had done.

The lady all but looked — "Oh! dear, what creatures men are."

"You are released," she exclaimed. "We said we would keep you up to midnight, and I am sure I do not wish to detain you any longer."

"Allow me to assure you, Miss Saxon," said Mr. M'Nimbus, "that in my opinion we have passed a purely representative evening of a time when everything's in a state of transition, and old customs are abjured without new being formed, and respectable prejudices are exposed to the ridicule of the imp of newfangle, and experiment's the rule, and failure's not the

exception, and rights are claimed which people have no capacity for exercising —"

"If my sex is being abused, I am not obliged to listen," said the lady. "You will write us a Christmas song, Mr. Helion?"

"Pudding is too weighty a topic for song," said that gentleman, "and it is not relieved by beef, or by turkey."

"Will you not grasp the spirit of the season?" said she.

"It has been done. Believe me, it won't bear repetition," said he.

"Ay! we shall have dancing to look on at tomorrow and next day," Sir John sighed.

"Well, papa, I will say for you, you never pretended to be pleased," said Miss Saxon. "Sir Patrick . . ."

"Sir Patrick, my dear young lady, has never," quoth he of the name, "said worse of your sex than that we men may now and then do with advantage what a painter does before his picture — step to a *slight distance*, you know, back away from it just to take a mental draught of the harmony and splendour of its proportions."

III.

THE ARGUMENT. — *A Review of the year: The Weather. Southwest Winds. Extraordinary Fact in Irish History. Mr. Froude in America. Mr. Mundella at Merthyr. France and Mr. Thiers. Bismarck. Germany and the Gaming Tables. Stanley and Livingstone. The Geneva Arbitration.*

In that hour which resembles the famous admonitory engravings of the human figure half in bloom, half laid bare by death, when the Old Year is about to make way for his posthumous son, he is still the most important person of the two, though no more can be hoped from him. The party sitting "Up to Midnight" discussed his deeds.

"We have had an entire autumn, and a portion of winter, of warm, soft, blubbery gales," said Mr. M'Nimbus. "We have

been stewed in a sort of draughty South Africa, and blown on by a flaccid sirocco, and drenched from morning to night; and this is your boasted climate south of the Tweed! It saps bricks and mortar, and it takes the cement out of me. It's like the times — a game of revolution and upsetting, a wrecking and a flooding: the seasons topsy-turvy, for their part, and the political pediment trying to stand on its apex, for its part."

MR. FINISTARE. "No description could be truer or sadder! The farmers apprehend a period of something like famine. Their only consolation — if it can be called one — is that it will teach a lesson to the labourers."

SIR JOHN. "Nonsense. We've had south-westers from the autumn right on to the middle of spring, and no famine came of them. Generally they were found to have done good. The farmers don't drain their land, and don't husband the rainfall. Read Mr. Bailey

Denton's letter in the *Times*. There you have sound sense. The farmers are inveterate waiters upon Providence. If we hadn't produced the grandest farmers and breeders in the world, I'd call them a pack of asses."

MR. HELION. "When the southwest blows it is summer in England, and, I confess, I prefer it. I was not born braced like the 'Children of the Mist,' who seem to be undone before the steam of a teapot."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "They may suspect your beverage is not man's natural drink, but the very reverse of it."

MR. BRIGHTON. "According to the old calendars the average gives us seven months of southwest wind per annum for England."

SIR PATRICK. "For Ireland, say nine. And it's the reason why whisky's not watered by art over there, seeing that nature does it uninvited."

SIR JOHN. "When the elements go to any of their excesses, pray for the wit to

profit by them; that's my creed in all things palpable."

MR. BRIGHTON. "You are right, Sir John, and I am glad to see you subscribe to one of the mottoes of the great Progressive party — 'Brains to the rescue.'"

SIR JOHN. "How? Be hanged if I subscribe to any of their mottoes, or their begging-lists; and I don't believe in their having brains to rescue us or themselves from the messes they get us into: if they had, they'd be villains past help of a shrift. But, now, tell me, what do you think the chief event of the year?"

SIR PATRICK. "The chief, for one thing — to speak with the pardonable pride of a man enamoured of his nationality — is a march we made in our island with a banner and a song, and the marching party marched, and the opposite party looked on — and that's the whole history of the affair, as I live!"

THE DOCTOR. "Notable indeed. But it

would be below the dignity of such an event to record it as merely one of the year's occurrences — it is an epoch in civilisation."

MR. HELION. "But it gives the year a properly imposing aspect to chronicle the fact that heads were *not* cracked on a certain occasion in Ireland in the year of Grace, 1872."

MR. BRIGHTON. "It throws a promising light on the years to come."

MR FINISTARE. "An unenviable reflection on the years preceding."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Or you may consider the circumstance an evidence of the sad decay of that ardent spirit of investigation which has for so many centuries urged the Irishman to solicit ocular demonstration of the existence and substantiality of his brother Irishman's brains."

MR. HELION. "Binocular — quadrocular demonstration! You forget the quality of the ardent spirit."

SIR PATRICK. "No fear of a pistol, gentlemen! Go on."

SIR JOHN. "I congratulate you with all my heart, Sir Patrick, on the matter you mention. There is Mr. Froude in America, now. I like his gallantry. I'd swear he went on a good impulse."

SIR PATRICK. "With a whip in his hand? to find the brains of the Irish emigrant and his spiritual father? It's the last of instruments for raising anything but a howl."

SIR JOHN. "He doesn't mince the truth for either of us. The claret is with you, by the way."

SIR PATRICK. "An ancestor of mine, good Sir Ulick Dalcassian, called out the host who reminded him of the misdemeanour of letting the claret stand; for, says he, 'tis worse than a common charge of murder, which is stopping the circulation of but one man, and I'm accused of doing that for a table of twelve — as bad as the slaughter of

a jury! *Toll* your head, Mr. Finistare, the tale is true."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "And pray, which was the survivor of that memorable duel?"

SIR PATRICK. "Myself, to be sure, or you'd never have seen me here."

MR. HELION. "You applaud Mr. Froude, Sir John. What do you say to Mr. Mundella at Merthyr?"

SIR JOHN. "This Trades' Unionism is a conspiracy that wants a front to meet it; none of your coddlers and wheezy go-betweens! Oh! the man meant well, I suppose; but you fellows blow the fire hot and then try to blow it cold, and it won't do."

MR. BRIGHTON. "To me Trades' Unions signify a capacity for expansion without causing explosion. They are symptoms of growth, and show the country breathing from a healthy deep chest. They are proofs of our vitality and guarantees of our security."

MR. FINISTARE. "The gas stokers have given you an indication of what they are

likely to be. I fear too surely they signify the coming of a period of total obscuration — the darker middle ages anticipated by Niebuhr, the reign of the brutish many, the reign of ignorance; the decay of art and whatsoever has hitherto made nations glorious and raised man above the animal."

SIR JOHN. "Not without a fight for it."

MR. HELION. "You have seen the best way of fighting it at Merthyr the other day."

SIR JOHN. "Well, they're no better off on the Continent. Lord forbid that I should wish them not to be! Poor France, too!"

THE DOCTOR. "Come, she has no reason to complain of the year. She has raised a miraculous loan."

MR. FINISTAIRE. "Without providing the means of paying the interest on it."

MR. BRIGHTON. "None doubt that she'll do that. She met her engagements honourably after disasters that would have

made almost any other nation take a pride in bankruptcy."

SIR JOHN. "Who's the 'she' you speak of? *She?* It's a '*he*' if you make out France to be a person."

MR. HELION. "In fact, it really is Thiers at present. *She* still looks to a *he* for deliverance, and he has done, on the whole, remarkably well. You see, he has a cracked instrument to perform upon. While playing he must be mending and tuning."

SIR PATRICK. "Paganini's nothing to him!"

MR. HELION. "Admit that his *bowing* is superb; it is not his fault if the fiddle rumbles and squeaks."

SIR JOHN. "Don't run your metaphor to death."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Do, for posterity's sake!"

SIR PATRICK. "D'ye think the little man in earnest about his Republic?"

MR. HELION. "He foresees the certainty of a king or an emperor being hurried prematurely into the Alsace-Lorraine struggle — the great epic of future

French history. The Republic can wait for its time. No individual ruler could. Whenever his reputation, his popularity, or what you will, began to wane, Alsace-Lorraine would be whispering at his pillow, until he would actually see, as clearly as Macbeth his dagger, the alternative of the march eastward, or personal ruin. Remember that there is in France a thirst to strike a blow, if only to vindicate the national valour."

MR. BRIGHTON. "There is common sense in France in spite of all that."

SIR PATRICK. "French common sense always seems to be playing like the porpoise, and exhibiting a lively, a rounded, and a glistening spine as it rolls over and over; but you never see it when you require it, and it won't come to a call."

MR. HELION. "Irish common sense, you mean?"

SIR PATRICK. "I said French; and I should be sorry to correct your hearing in the

good ancient fashion, common in schools, when my state demanded a teacher with a ready hand, and a swing to it."

MR. HELION. "Sir Patrick, our rules prohibit the taking of offence."

SIR PATRICK. "None is possible in the presence of Sir John's *haut brion*."

SIR JOHN. "I shan't endanger my life a second time by asking you to pass it on. By the way, you don't take to my hock."

SIR PATRICK. "I can see the merit of hock, but can't discover in my system what it appeals to, nor the makers of hock either."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "It is the habit of Germans to appeal to men's *heads*."

SIR PATRICK. "The stick they employ is unhandsomely thick."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "They measure it by the skull they address it to."

SIR PATRICK. "It is a kindness, and proves them to be methodical men of impulse."

SIR JOHN. "I wish no harm to the Germans. Wherever they go they're good citizens, and that's the highest praise for a race, in my opinion. All I know is that Bismarck has bled France, and France has borrowed of us to such a degree that he acts on the precious metal like the Unknown Power on the weather: we have to watch him like a barometer."

SIR PATRICK. "True. If the fork of his tail begins to redden and curl up his leg, we're in a fume. If he scratches the point of his ear, we ask if it's time to be shrieking."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Stock Exchange speculators may find themselves doing something like that; but there's no reason for the rest of the world to be much disturbed."

SIR PATRICK. "Sir John compares him to the Unknown Power, my friend; and what's the Unknown Power that plays on the precious metal but the poodle that appeared before Faust, and is just

now operating like a Jew and an alchemist by turns, in flashes, nipping your gold, and again coining it out of nothing, till the double rascal stands in the middle of us, like the peg of a rope, and all Europe spinning round and round him in a vertigo? That's Bismarck."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Germany deserves well of the world this year, if only for suppressing the infamous gaming-tables."

MR. FINISTARE. "They will spring up elsewhere!"

MR. BRIGHTON. "At any rate Germany has purified her soil of the stain."

THE DOCTOR. "Poor Homburg! and pretty Baden-Baden! Worthy men of my profession have found comfortable incomes there."

SIR JOHN. "Humph! Other professors have found incomes there. *We* complain of the settled outcome there used to be there. German ingenuity will be taxed to keep up the amusements in those

places, and I should like to hear of the result. What games will they invent?"

SIR PATRICK. "Feats of German agility on a grand scale! A selection of German sceptics arguing! Fifty German professors engaged in excited dialectics through as many as fifty trombones!

"There'll be the future amusements offered at Homburg and Baden-Baden. Indeed, I like the idea. And the loudest professor I'd promote to the big drum."

MR. HELION. "I would compel all dogmatists to deliver themselves through the trombone."

THE DOCTOR. "Upon my word, Sir Patrick, the show would be very attractive."

SIR PATRICK. "For one visit, Doctor. You wouldn't see the same faces there again."

MR. BRIGHTON. "We have been beaten by an American this year."

MR. FINISTARE. "You allude to Bancroft?"

MR. BRIGHTON. "I allude to Stanley."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Eh, it was from Bancroft we had our thrashing."

MR. HELION. "As well say it was from the trigger you received your shot. America was nearer British Columbia than you, and she knew what she wanted long before you did. Gold was discovered, and you *then* thought your possession important. America recruits her diplomatic ranks from among men distinguished in literature. You get yours you know where. So America expressed herself distinctly, and you did not. And you pay for it. You have the article you want, I suppose — well-born men to represent you abroad; and if you have to pay for them in an island or two, and the loss of command of a channel, you are rich enough to pay."

MR. BRIGHTON. "I was speaking of Stanley. We made amends to him for a certain coldness. . . ."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Amends, do you say? Sir, we implored him not to be angry with

us, to convey home to his immense and powerful continent a bosom cherishing wrath. And that's what we've been doing with all Americans. For my part, I would be willing to see them some hundreds of years hence, and not before."

MR. BRIGHTON. "I maintain that Stanley's expedition was worthy of the heroic spirit of enterprise of his noble country."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Worthy to be recorded in his noble country heroic oratory."

MR. HELION. "The achievement in archery was for one bowman to hit the mark and the other to split his arrow. Livingstone hit Africa and Stanley, Livingstone. Will that satisfy you, Brighton?"

THE DOCTOR. "My father licked all creation, and I licked *him*."

MR. BRIGHTON. "I know that in your hearts you do justice to Stanley, and to the man who sent him."

MR. HELION. "Yes; but you and your friends have been overdoing it, as usual. Bates, again! You gave the signal to the public to set the kettle of cajolery boiling, and we went in for another maundering fit about our 'cousins.' They naturally ask themselves, What can you possibly think of them if you think they like it? and they attribute your proceedings to a mixture of contempt and fear."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Their own cousinly sentiments are written plainly in the documents submitted by them to the Council of the Geneva Arbitration."

MR. BRIGHTON. "You have no warrant for saying so. The *Alabama* —"

SIR JOHN. "I think I hear the bel's!"

SIR PATRICK. "I salute them for saving us from an enforced cruise in that phantom ship. If payment of three millions and more will not exercise her, we're haunted till the Continent swallows the island."

MR. BRIGHTON. "One moment. I have a

word to say upon the Geneva Arbitration."

MR. FINISTARE. "Our enemy has smitten us upon our right cheek and we have offered him our left."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "We turned away from him in grief, and he precipitated our departure."

MR. BRIGHTON. "The question is this —"

MR. HELION. "Are those bells musical or not?"

MR. BRIGHTON. "Are we English above or below our professions? Have we reached a point where we can conceive the right thing to do for the good of humanity, without yet having our natures possessed by the spirit of the thing? After giving a pre-eminent example, are we ashamed to wrap ourselves in our own virtues? Or do we find the robes too scant? The principle —"

SIR PATRICK. "Spare us the 'principle.' "

SIR JOHN. "I'm afraid we can't have the 'principle.' "

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Eh? the principle? It's the voice of the metaphysics of politics. It's the fiction his party lives on, and the formula it strikes us to the earth with."

MR. HELION. "My dear Brighton, stop! Let a man of no party tell you that you are exactly in the condition of yours at this instant — you are too late for the midnight, and too early for the morning."

MR. BRIGHTON. "On the next occasion —"

THE DOCTOR. "That's equivalent to a threat."

SIR JOHN. "I will not be threatened! There's no mistake about the bells now. We're in 1873. Your hands, gentlemen, and good night."

MR. FINISTARE. "Is it the credulity of human nature, or the farce we insist upon playing, which makes us begin the New Year with every symptom of joy?"

MR. BRIGHTON. "I don't know at all, but I hear the piano in the drawing

room, where nonsense of that kind is never broached, and I shall go there. Come, Helion!"

MR. HELION. "I fancy some of the little ones have been kept up to dance the New Year in. I'll come."

SIR PATRICK. "And I, for we must keep a watch on Optimy. Pessimy merely effects the coloration of the mind, but Optimy aims at hurrying mind and body on a locomotive, and if he will mount the ladies on that engine our fiddle has sounded its last."

IV.

THE ARGUMENT. — *Prospects of the Year to Come. Gloomy Views of Mr. Finistare. Recurrence of the Duel between Optimy and Pessimy. Singular Conduct of a Sailor. Illustrations of Force, Jupiter, Prometheus, and the Plan of Humpty-Dumpty. Picture of a Prosperous Ireland in Attachment. The Prussian Model. Notices of Future Subjects.*

Another rise of the river flowing under his lawn, and a spread of the freshet, kept Sir John Saxon in active occupation among his dependents. In this condition he discovered that conversation with friends is a specific for the diversion of thought, which will otherwise brood upon disasters like a cloud in the mind, and he begged them to stay with him yet a while, and help build an ark if there should be occasion for it. His philosophical composure was troubled.

Burgundy was substituted for claret on the table. He had to be reminded by Mr. Brighton that he had said our principal concern and prayer was to learn to profit by the excesses of the elements. "Tell that to a shipwrecked sailor clinging to the rigging in a gulf of the sea!" he remarked.

The tone of despondency roused Mr. Finistare, as a dark bird of the fens is moved to clap his wings and soar by the traveller's footsteps. He delivered himself: "Ah! there's an end of our false conceits when the tremendous forces of nature are let loose on us. We have to cast them off like a man that must swim for his life. The state of society at present is a reflex of the disorderly elements. We have a deluge of pauperism and ruffianism: we cannot make head against the prevailing vice and crime. Look at the newspapers in their right colours, their columns are streaming with blood."

SIR PATRICK. "Dear! dear!"

MR. FINISTARE. "Am I guilty of exaggera-

tion? I am aware that I take the unpopular course when I attempt to make you realise our position. The apology of drunkenness for manslaughter is a thing of daily occurrence. What are you doing to stop the drunken frenzy?"

SIR JOHN. "Now, don't ask me to support the Permissive Bill, Finistare. I won't."

MR. FINISTARE. "That obsequious invitation to the poor to look to the welfare of their bodies and souls, called Teetotalism, has failed. They must be driven in herds. You must compel them to live decently."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Then, at least, you will take measures to make a decent life agreeable to them? Otherwise I conceive your intention to be to treat them pretty much like slaves."

MR. FINISTARE. "For a term, I would. That is, if to put restrictions upon them is to do so. I know some of those Permissive-Bill men, and they are the pick of our workmen and small

tradesmen, and a drop in the ocean of our population."

THE DOCTOR. "Puritanism never had strong root in that class in England."

MR. BRIGHTON. "We love liberty! We hate tyranny!"

MR. FINISTARE. "Puritanism is the only thing that will save you. I warn you of that. I am no alarmist, but if we are to speculate upon what the year before us is to bring forth, I think it more expedient to give up all rose-coloured delusions, and especially our habit of sucking phrases like sweetmeats — liberty is one of them, for example. We read the newspapers daily, and yet we surround ourselves with a description of scenic extravaganza conjured up to displace uncomfortable facts. The image of it is the Florentine Garden established in the midst of the Plague."

SIR PATRICK. "With charming stories and delightful ladies! But, Finistare, where are they?"

THE DOCTOR. "Fie, Sir Patrick! When you have so many beautiful photographs in shop windows, and such a lot of novels."

SIR JOHN. "I don't know about the novels, but, as a magistrate, I say it strikes me the other things come under the interpretation of a certain Act. Some of them do, decidedly."

MR. FINISTARE. "The education of men demands that they should read the harshest aspects of the truth. Wrecks are temporary evils, and floods too; though you will have to pay for both: but strikes are not, and still less so the assassinations. These are not 'writ in water.' They operate like breaches of the land, from passions as inconsiderate as the sea, and the business of all able men is to set to work to repair the damage. We are labouring in a gale — firmly seated though we may seem — as heavy as you wou'd find out in mid-Atlantic, and to the full as

destructive and as threatening to the country."

SIR PATRICK. "Half a minute, my prophetic friend. I am reminded of the story of the sailor in the sinking ship, when all hands were working the pumps, and with every breath he fetched he sang a bit of 'The Last Rose of Summer'; and they say that after an hour or two of it, it had so surprising and prodigious an effect on the crew that they gained ground on the water."

MR. HELION. "And they were saved. A well-known story. The crew stated in their depositions that compressed laughter at the absurdity of their comrade in singing a song at such a time acted like steam power on their energies."

SIR PATRICK. "And you remember, Helion, the wonderful thing was the rascal never would own he had lifted a note."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Come, come, Finistare, I can't let you escape."

MR. HELION. "Yes, but the crew were di-

vided as to the song, and some said it was, 'The Bonny Bunch of Roses O.' "

MR. FINISTARE. "I can assure you I have no idea of escaping. Besides . . . "

SIR PATRICK. "Why, 'The Bonny Bunch of Roses' is the British sailors' song of the Great Napoleon to his son and heir. I've heard it —

O son, don't be so venturesome,
As to try to steal the Bonny Bunch of Roses O.

meaning the British Isles, you know."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Let the two have it out, Sir Patrick. Finistare deserves his answer, and I should like to hear it."

SIR PATRICK. "It was just to show him how that we survived the shakes of the fist of the First Imperial Nap, and shall another enemy, at home or abroad. D'ye hear them? They're off. Finistare is catching it. They've piped engines and away on their parallel lines, and one calls his terminus Perdition, and t'other Millennial Bliss!"

THE DOCTOR. "Pessimy for a broadside!"

SIR PATRICK. "With his newspapers and police lists he has a mine of sinister illustration for his argument. But Optimy's my boy for a speech. He enlarges the landscape. He's so mighty horizontal."

MR. BRIGHTON. "So far I have taken you categorically, Finistare. I do not expect to prove anything to a head possessed by preconceived ideas; but you go beyond the limits recognised between reasonable men when you maintain that our civilisation is superficial or artificial. And, goodness! to say that you cannot rely on it at all, excepting as you see it — do I misquote you? — in the two services, the Army and Navy! I can't see your meaning."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Eh! there is a meaning, though. And there's sense in the meaning. He means *discipline*, to be sure — a perfectly reliable civilisation, which

is chain — mail of discipline, and not a coat of varnish."

MR. BRIGHTON. "So you are for promoting civilisation by strengthening the agents of barbarism, and putting us at their mercy? The wildest of our visionaries have not vented such inconceivable nonsense. This is the everlasting outcry of the retrogressionists — Trust to Force! namely, the force of the strong arm. I charge it upon a puerile impatience that this cry is raised, and I do not hesitate to trace that angry impatience to cowardice. You are in a difficulty, and you instantly make your appeal to a system that shall turn men into machines."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Sir, the difference between us comes of our different reading of the nature of men."

MR. FINISTARE. "You have abandoned the rod, Brighton, and with it all idea of schooling."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Remember that Force was

one of the emissaries despatched by Jove to bind Prometheus!"

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Eh! If I mistake not, the fellow was accused of thieving. Under which circumstances it was as well that the Law should be brought to bear on him, and by the very stoutest of the agents at the disposal of the tenant Ruler of the world of that period, or else it is quite certain that he would soon have been pronounced a potentate of Sound, and no more."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Rejoice, Mr. M'Nimbus, in thinking that you have found the leaky end of an illustration; but, for all that, you don't scuttle the fact in question, which is, I maintain, that the heroic efforts of Humanity have always found their enemy in the instrument known as Force. Your sympathies may be with Jupiter or any other tyrant. Mine, and I am happy to believe the majority of my countrymen are with me, go against him. He was to the old Greeks, or I should say to

the reflective Greeks, pretty much the same as the chief of an army among a subject population in an invaded country — an alien to their hopes, the foe of their aspirations! and his gods were an aristocracy of power opposed to a democracy of mortals — prayed to, feasted, sacrificed to, hymned to, adjured and entreated with blood and incense, but hated, hated! Yes, in spite of your simple Homer and your pious Pindar, I say hated; and because they were feared, and were supposed to be propitiated by gifts. They were the Lords of the Middle Ages, and the Capitalists of ours — hated now, perhaps, a little unreasonably; say *distrusted* now. It is a stage to better things: nevertheless it may easily be whipped back to hatred. For Caliban, no doubt, Prospero's revised form of Government was the best. But the common men in our day are not quite Calibans — are they? Finistare and M'Nimbus would treat them, I know,

always with the suspicion of their tendency to revert to the Caliban stage of human evolution. But such an administration will not elevate them, and as we cannot cast ourselves from them, and would not if we could — for it would be an insufferable baseness — we must raise them, and share our lot with them."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "And let every unit be the equal of the number one! It may be called the plan of Humpty-Dumpty, or the confusion of atoms caused by the suicide of him that sat on a wall."

SIR PATRICK. "A diversion, Sir John, I implore you! By the way, to borrow Optimy's telling tongue a minute, I charge it upon you that we've fallen into the jaws of our Scylla and Charybdis, as in the wash of the wave there and back across the straits. You began."

SIR JOHN. "If you had been listening to your tenantry all day, and glancing over the papers for a diversion before din-

ner, you would have begun too, Sir Patrick. You are prosperous in Ireland."

SIR PATRICK. "We have not violently accelerated the death rate of late, and are not starving. That's true. But, for prosperity, we feel something like the man who, by the luck of circumstances, became attached to the grappling hook of the balloon. Says he, 'I'm elevated, but my destiny's entirely depending upon this immense inflation,' and, he might have added, 'which same may be made to grovel and collapse by a combination of gas stokers.' Doctor Anthony, you are silent tonight, my dear sir. Generally, when I put old Ireland up you're not behindhand for a laugh and a fling."

THE DOCTOR. "Not from want of love for her."

SIR PATRICK. "Entirely like the little boys, then, who have a pretty affection for flies."

THE DOCTOR. "I see too many doctors in

the field tonight to come forward professionally."

SIR PATRICK. "True; and there's no hoping to kill *them* with a prescription. We have fal en a prey to Optimy and Pessimy, when, in fact, we ought to reduce them to the service of acting chorus to us right and left — Primo and Basso."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Yes, Finistare, you have again taken your cue from the Continent. French Communism has frightened you; French Imperialism, resulting from French Republicanism, has appeared to warn you and advise you; German success, owing to Prussian solidity, has presented itself to you as the solution of your puzzle. So now you are for a King, who is to be King indeed. You are for a Minister who scoffs at sentimental fallacies, at all systems which he can prove unsound with the strong arm; you are for a State acting like an engine — so very simple in its complexity! In short,

the Prussian model is the model you would offer us. You have had your strikes in Prussia, too."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Repressed."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Better fight them out on the spot than have them repressed."

SIR JOHN. "None of that, Brighton! Postponement is wise policy. Always postpone the active settlement of a quarrel, if you can."

MR. BRIGHTON. "I give notice that I do not let this subject drop."

SIR PATRICK. "I give notice that I have to speak an eulogy — praying it mayn't be an elegy — on the question of Credit; and that I feel it personally and deeply you will take for granted when I say that without the intervention of that benignest of the Goddesses, you'd never be hearing the voice that addresses you now. I defend the grocers. Moreover, I undertake to do it convincingly."

THE DOCTOR. "I congratulate them on their advocate. Some time hence I shall

have a word to say upon modern spiritualistic manifestations."

SIR JOHN. "Ay, but no holding forth, no advocacy. Don't let's be fiery men, but sober citizens exchanging ideas over a table we hope to keep from trouble — as much as we can."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Good heart, Sir John! The prospect of the year is a trifle cloudy at present, but when did Englishmen shrink from looking at a cloud?"

SIR JOHN. "I don't call it a cloud when English labourers decline to give honest work for their money. It looks to me as if the Brute had found out his strength and meant to reign."

MR. BRIGHTON. "If to our misfortune he should try it, he will make the same discovery as the Brute did when he originally came across *men* for a trial of strength."

SIR JOHN. "Let us hope for the best, and pray for our fellows, and sleep Christians!"

V.

THE ARGUMENT. — *An Invocation of Sir Tatton Sykes. Desire for the metropolis in wet weather. A scene of the Floods, and discussions on the picturesque. Mr. M'Nimbus recommends a method of imparting admiration of it. Poetic farmers' boys and bootmakers. English imagination. Emperor Napoleon: a subject for History, not for Poetry. His great service to Italy. Mr. M'Nimbus on Dynasties in France. The Emperor's fortitude. The Napoleonic legend, and its effect on French digestion. Sir Patrick cites Marshal MacMahon in favor of the Emperor. Short passage of arms between Sir Patrick and Mr. M'Nimbus.*

"Weather like this would have been enough to drive good old Sir Tatton Sykes to London!" Sir John Saxon said, invoking the memory of that departed friend,

the idol of his youth, for whom he claimed rank as one of the first and grandest among recent generations of Englishmen. Venerable Sir Tatton, though his fields were under water and his rides a slough, would have stuck to country we may be sure; but his degenerate admirers had a craving for tonics of the mind which are produced in town, and are nowhere out of it to be had of so sparkling an astringency, notwithstanding the skill of our journals in bottling them. Nay, the effect of these is to turn one's horse's head to town, as by a natural attraction; they create an excitement in a man of ordinary combat and energy that it is only to be allayed by his brushing against his fellows.

Mr. Helion had drawn attention to the "picturesqueness of the Floods" on a night when Venus was about to breast them, overflowing with her warm white fire. Jove was coming from the eastward, and the strip of a moon was in a cloud by itself. Jove was just visible, Venus luminous, Dian veiled and tossing away frag-

ments of dusky-coloured vapour to the gale; there was a space of untroubled blue, darkening about the setting star, and the vast calm sheet of the invading water, with its line of riverside sallows and field-dividing elms and hedgerows, reflected all. The scene was of a memorable splendour. Unfortunately, Mr. Helion used the term "picturesque," and thereby set the satiric powers of Mr. M'Nimbus in motion. He drummed on it for the better part of an hour. The picturesque! That was our modern craze! We rushed abroad in a perpetual fever to catch sight of the picturesque, too often the painted curtain across a tragedy! It filled us with wind, and made us think ourselves possessed by the sublime Unutterable, because we could express just nothing at all concerning it, and he was the inspired man of the party who managed to convey his sensations in the greater number of gasps and exclamations, like a howling dervish! Eh, the picturesque. It was a purely latter-day phantasy; a delusion invented to flatter the

idle-minded; a make-believe of something immense in them, which they were at pains to communicate by a set of newly coined phrases belonging to no known mortal tongue. Mr. M'Nimbus recommended, in the place of any further attempt at speech upon the matter of the picturesque, that the slap in the stomach, said to be the expressive call for sympathy under the influence of great emotions between neighbours among certain Eastern tribes, be administered. We should thus contrive to be understood immediately; we should address ourselves to the seat of our wonderful ideas as regards the picturesque.

Mr. Brighton expostulated on behalf of the picturesque. He thought it an elevating and ennobling passion; he was sure that it led us on by a civilising process; for proof of which he cited farmers' boys and bootmakers, and others of low estate, who had risen to the publication of poems under the holy charm of the aspects of nature.

Mr. M'Nimbus pointedly remarked that he preferred good boots to bad poems.

Mr. Helion agreed that they were altogether preferable; "and there can be no doubt," said he, "that these versicles of the half-literate come frequently of a restless craving for the jam tarts of society. A kind clergyman fancies he has caught a Chatterton, and a reviewer anxious to expend an ebbing literary enthusiasm in the purchase of a situation as benefactor in a biography, lifts the victim on a puff. Ladies pet the victim. He gets his bit of jam tart and some blancmange; but it is discovered that he is not a Chatterton, and he is let down again. Clergymen, reviewer, and victim, are chiefly to blame, in about equal proportions; the world and the picturesque are not; and there will always be the picturesque to console the poor fellow, if his passion for it was originally genuine."

"Eh, if he can see the picturesque through the bedraggled drab of a thriftless non-cooking British wife!" said Mr. M'Nimbus. "But the truth first, and the picturesque after it, and insomuch and no more

than it harmonises with the actual present truth."

"To the deuce with the picturesque when it drowns my land, and ruins my tenants, and starves poor labouring men!" cried Sir John, ruffled by the beauty of the cruel scene, or by the praises of it.

Sir Patrick, Doctor Anthony, and Mr. Finistare had gone. Mr. M'Nimbus, Mr. Brighton, and Mr. Helion followed them, and Sir John, left alone with the picturesque, hated it. He was consequently soon back in London, where the news of the death of the ex-Emperor Napoleon was two days old. This was an event to warm him through and through by filliping imagination — a spirit generally too insignificant in our country to obtain release, except when famous persons suffer such reverses as to stumble, to fall, or to die; for if they are comfortably housed, fed, and attended, we English know that a decease must be against their wishes, and by that means the notion of an over-shadowing calamity is superinduced, which is, as all who have

listened to gossips are aware, the alarm clock of popular imagination. It must of necessity get up and come out, or we perish of a fever of the nerves.

In the case of Sir John Saxon, he, assisted by the journals, thought and imagined sufficient over the event to modify his drenched, quaking idea of the floods, and make him look back on the scene applauded by Mr. Helion, as on the accessories of a funeral pageant of a mournful and touching picturesqueness. He insisted strongly on the *de mortuis* maxim in speaking of the ex-Emperor. He wanted to have an ode or an elegy written on the subject, and suggested one or other of these forms of verse to Mr. Helion. That gentleman bowed, and supposed that many odes and elegies would be composed, but not by poets.

SIR JOHN. "Why not? Because we've got none?"

MR. HELION. "This occasion will not be a test whether you have them or not.

Read Byron's lines on the 'First Napoleon,' and Manzoni's 'Fifth of May,' beginning 'Efu,' which is untranslateable to our language in its effect. You will find in those two poems exactly what will be missing in a poem on Napoleon III, for the reason that the last of the Napoleonides does not supply the stuff. He is for history. The good qualities in him make no appeal to poetry, and poetry spurns the bad. He is seen to have been successful generally by accident, and unsuccessful owing to unfulfilled pretensions. The position he presumed to seize compelled him to act the part of a military chief, and he was not one; he was simply an artillery student and a reader of his uncle's life. His Italian campaign was his last piece of luck. For that, however, he deserves the glorification of Italians. I do not wonder to find in that period a poetess of high lyrical exaltation magnifying him. The expedition to Italy was his

noblest public act, and the monument about to be set up in memory of his service to the Italian cause in Milan will celebrate it, and confound the accusers who decline to see that he had a virtue. A real but not a roving Juvenal might point the sternest moral from the career of this man, who was true in private friendship, personally amiable, without rancour, without meanness, capable of conceiving loftily, and risking largely for a supreme object, and who yet, in his own country, after twenty years of trial as a monarch, earned the gratitude of none but the shopkeepers."

SIR JOHN. "I don't like that way of speaking at all. He was our staunch friend; he was the friend of England. I call that a title worth having."

MR. FINISTARE. "He was the friend of England so long as the exigencies of his dynasty permitted it. Bismarck's revelations have shown that the France of

Imperialism might have had a surprise for you."

SIR PATRICK. "Bismarck, my dear Finistare, might cock his eye at any one of us here and make us smell of brimstone. Would that be our fault, I ask you?"

MR. M'NIMBUS. "The exigencies of his dynasty! There you ring the crack. A conjuror has his exigencies; I am not aware that a dynasty has, nor that a leader of men should have. To perpetuate a dynasty requires a clean hand, or a strong one, not a surpassingly flashing one at legerdemain, that hatches an egg in a pocket handkerchief, an eagle out of a chestnut. Work well for the day; leave a dynasty to the care of itself. A dynasty in France is the lid on a pot. There's nothing for it to take root in. He was a dreamer, not a leader, least of all, a worker. His strength was with his agents. He was a supine man of many servants in a city of luxury, the which is a signification of a day of

betrayal and explosion to come. Of all men he should have been alertest, for when he gained his throne he agreed to supply the place of Providence to the French people, to labour for them, to think for them, to fatten them, and to give them glory cheap."

THE DOCTOR. "He has shown a princely fortitude under every form of adversity. In exile, in imprisonment, defeated on the battlefield, all but hopeless in the hands of the surgeons, and his dislike of pain was as sensitive as yours or mine. He met his fate bravely, with complete dignity."

SIR JOHN. "There! that's what I admire in him; and I'll tell you this into the bargain: Everything the French have to thank him for he has got from us. Whatever they don't like in him was owing to themselves."

MR. BRIGHTON. "Hardly so bad as that. But they were fully prepared for the Napoleonic advent; they wanted only the spark when their Napoleon ap-

peared before them. They cannot stand aside to blame him. Napoleonism was in their blood. All they can say is, that when he rushed to his ruin and theirs he did it unreadily, and so far deceived them."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Hence their sobs."

MR. FINISTARE. "The Monarchist Thiers, the Republican Béranger, and all the French song-writers, assisted to sow the Napoleonic legend. By their aid the French have been fed on falsified history for fifty years. They enjoyed it. They were shut out from the light, and fed in any quantities, until egregious vanity became a monstrous organ in their debilitated constitutions."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Which lost them Strassburg."

MR. HELION. "Be generous. They have had their lesson, and are trying hard to extract a profit from it. I shudder for our virtue when I hear this complacent language of their censors."

MR. FINISTARE. "Napoleon I was the scourge

of Europe: the base and idle French worship of him has made Napoleon III the scourge of France."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Napoleon III happened to be not a general, or there would have been danger of another edition of the First."

SIR PATRICK. "Listen to me, and justice be our law. My countryman, the illustrious Emperor's best marshal, and one of the true gentlemen of a world much in want of the article — I mean the late Napoleon —"

MR. M'NIMBUS. "It appears you are in some confusion, Sir Patrick."

SIR PATRICK. "Sir, I'll not think it an enemy's eye to which it so appears, for as they say, the odds are even to a looker-on, and my meaning is clear to the fancy, though it mayn't go off like a squib. And, let me add, Mr. M'Nimbus, that I give you credit for predicting all the disasters of France, and perceiving that a beaten general must be a bad one. Keep to the

winning side, Sir, and count on a supper for a song. Don't I remember the Tuileries in its glory, and that I was once a guest there? And where was there a better host than His Majesty, the Emperor? *Vive l' Empereur!* I'll cry just thrice as loud, not *because* he's dead. Five hours he sat in the saddle at Sedan, and which suffered most of him, the soul or the body, this world shall never know; but take them together, and no martyr in his agony can call on a greater expiation for mortal sin, or — I speak under correction — a livelier claim upon human forgiveness, and let us hope and devoutly pray, divine. Sir, we are all sinners, and the Judge is above."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "But not distant."

SIR PATRICK. "You tempt me to fear it, Sir, for I have been taught to associate the idea of Him with mercy, with compassion, with leniency."

MR. M'NIMBUS. "Nay, those be three dif-

ferent qualities; or merely in the sum of them, eloquence?"

SIR PATRICK. "They are variations of the same, Sir; the address of a *treble knock* to the door not likely to open to a beggarly *one*. But I am reminded by your divergencies of the remark I was making, which is, that my honourable countryman, Marshal M'Mahon, in his evidence before the committee of some sort sitting to inquire into the cause of the disasters of the late war, declares that the Emperor, his master, was irresponsible for the calamity of Sedan in any way, and indeed twice, and the second time pressingly, advised him not to direct his march towards Bazaine, but to retreat to Paris. Therefore, Sir, I am with M'Mahon, and I exonerate the Emperor."

SIR JOHN. "I hold with you, Sir Patrick."

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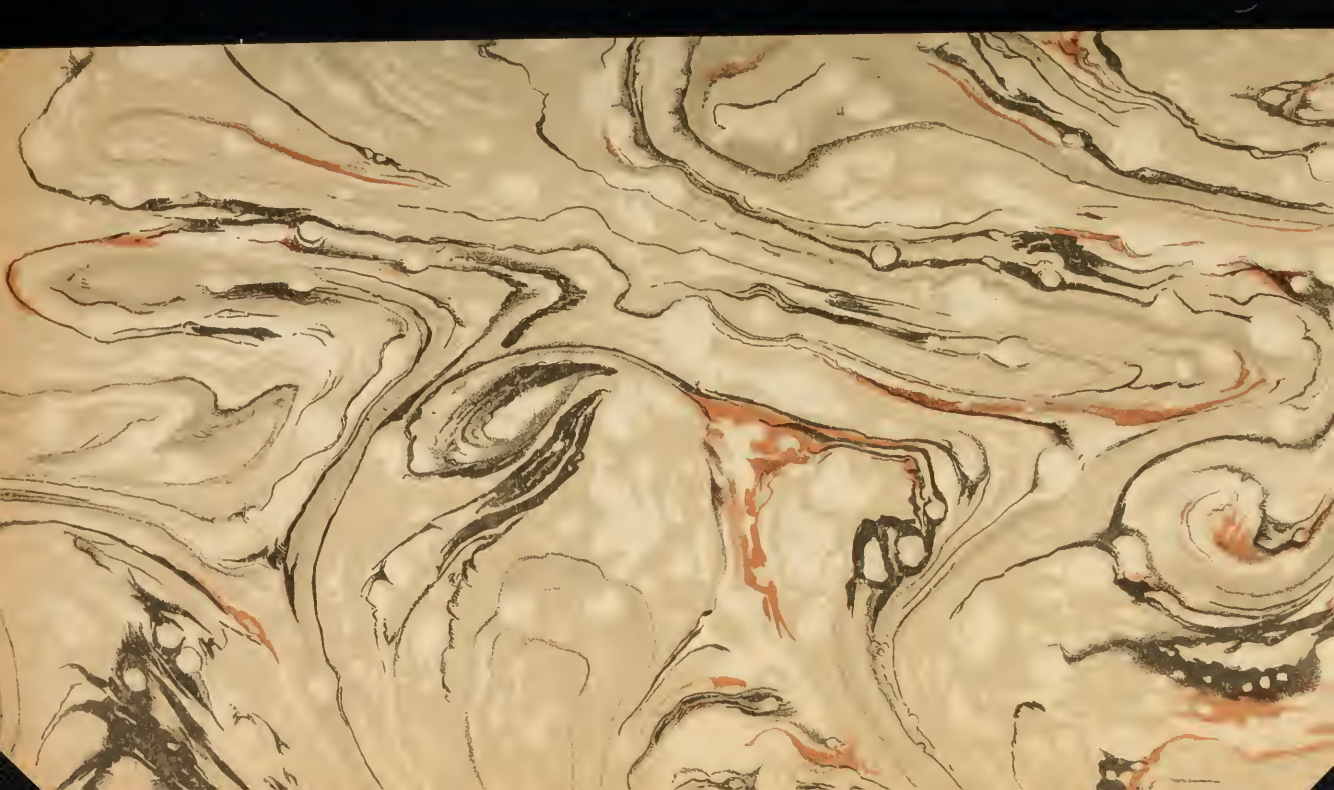
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